

LifeGroup

Date: September 10, 2023

Text: Matthew 16:13-20

Theme: In Tandem

Let Loose the Good Stuff

Belong Has anyone ever asked you about Jesus and if you thought he really was who he said he was? How did you feel? Defensive, like how dare they ask me that question...they should know how I feel; or maybe a bit uncomfortable at being put on the spot to answer the right way and a little leery of what the person is really trying to say? Your response will vary depending on who is asking, of course, but the question is an extremely important one and one from which we shouldn't shy away. It's also a question that Jesus invites us to ask, knowing as Jeremiah tells us, that God has placed God's laws on our hearts so that we will already know God, compelling us to search for God.

Our text from Matthew starts with that very question. However, that was just the lead in question. Jesus was moving them into something beyond belief in him and toward a deeper relationship with him. Jesus was showing the disciples what it meant to connect their lives to him and was teaching how they could work in tandem to be an active part of God's unfolding kingdom by letting loose the good stuff. It's a message that still resonates today.

Prayer... Heavenly Father, at times we've allowed our lives to become so busy we've disconnected from you, leaving us feeling bound to the lives we've created for ourselves. Guide us so that we may know you more deeply and understand how we can be active parts in your kingdom. Amen.

Believe Read Matthew 16:13-20. The text opens with Jesus asking his disciples to tell him about what people are saying about who he is. You have to wonder if Jesus was really curious about what others thought of him or if there was something else going on since it just doesn't seem to fit his nature to be concerned about what other people thought of him. His disciples tell him that they are hearing that some people think he is John the Baptist, while others thought he was Elijah or possibly Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.

•*Do you think people are still confused today about Jesus?*

After hearing what people were thinking, Jesus turns his focus to his disciples and asks them the same question. One could come to the incorrect conclusion that Jesus may have been a little insecure since people didn't understand who he was or what he was trying to teach and felt he needed to ask his disciples directly about it. However, knowing Jesus' nature to teach, he was using this as an opportunity to continue showing his disciples how they were going to fit into the bigger picture.

You get the sense that Peter didn't hesitate at all nor had any doubt

of who Jesus was when he told him you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, painting a stark difference in understanding between Peter and the people they were ministering to. Knowing that if his good news is going to expand beyond himself and the people directly around him, Jesus would need others to carry his message and only the people who knew exactly who he was would be able to start it. To confirm this, Jesus acknowledges Peter's answer and goes on to say that he will become the rock on which his church will be built.

•*Why was it important that Peter learn who Jesus was from God and not man?*

•*What does Jesus mean when he says to Peter, "On this rock I will build my church"? To what church is he referring?*

Jesus tells Peter that he will be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Turning over the keys to anything requires a certain level of trust because you are allowing someone else to use something of value to you...a little like when a parent turns over the keys to the family car to their teenager for the first time. Before that happens, the parent will go along on many practice drives helping the teenager develop experience and confidence so that the young driver will make good decisions when the time comes to be let loose and drive alone.

•*What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? How does that relate to us? Where is the kingdom of heaven?*

•*What does Jesus mean when he says, "Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"?*

Become God's intention for us is that we live our lives fully and abundantly or, in other words, to let loose the good stuff. However, being able to let loose requires us to let go of the things that worry us and bind us up. When our lives become so tightly bound with worry, anger or frustration, we get to a place where we can't move in any direction and do all we can to just exist each day. Instead of being filled with hope, looking forward to each day, we struggle to get up and dread what lies ahead of us.

In the book of John, Jesus appears to his disciples and says, "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*" To forgive someone is to set them free or let them loose and Jesus' example to us through the prayer he taught us is for us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. God's forgiveness allows us to be let loose from the things that bind us and join him in being part of the kingdom of heaven through the love and compassion he has placed within us. He places his trust in us to use the love and compassion to guide us in our daily lives, allowing us to let loose the good stuff by being willing to reach out and share ourselves with others.

Prayer... Lord God, we are so grateful for the gift of life that you have given us and we long to use that gift to the best of our ability. We open ourselves to you and each other to let loose the love and compassion you placed within so that we can be active parts of your kingdom. Amen.

Daily Walk on the Rock

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Day 1: Monday—To What Does It All Point?

The disciples have seen Jesus manifest his authority over nature (stilling the storm, multiplying the loaves), physical affliction (healing), and spiritual forces (driving out demons, forgiving sin); they have seen the signs, but do they understand the greater truth or revelation to which these point? Jesus takes his followers to a site in far northern Israel, a place rife with pagan gods, and asks them a defining question. Read Matthew 16:13-20; note that ‘Son of Man’ has Messianic connotations and is a title Jesus uses for himself throughout the Gospels (see *Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; 26:64*). Pray the Spirit will open your heart and mind to see Jesus more clearly.

Day 2: Tuesday—An Easy Question, then a Very Personal One

Jesus knows the cross lies ahead, and the disciples have much which they must yet learn/understand, so Jesus withdraws with them to Caesarea Philippi, where he begins to question them about his identity. Barclay writes, “It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world’s religions...and demanded to be compared with them and...have the verdict given in his favor” (*The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2, p.135, Westminster Press, 1975*). Read Matthew 16:13-20. First Jesus asks an unthreatening, impersonal question; why? Then Jesus asks a question that demands a verdict; what is it? Ponder Peter’s answer. Talk to Jesus about how you would respond.

Day 3: Wednesday—What Does This Mean?

Peter answers Jesus’ question about his identity with the bold, faith-filled proclamation, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (*Matthew 16:16*). Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew Messiah; Messiah means Anointed One. In Jesus’ day, the Jews were awaiting the Messiah, the promised king from the line of David, who would be anointed and empowered by God to redeem/rescue his people and establish God’s kingdom on earth. Consider not only what Messiah means, but also ‘Son of the living God’ as you read Matthew 16:15-17; John 1:14,18,32-34; 3:14-18; 4:25-26; 11:4; 17:1-5; 20:30-31; and Hebrews 1:1-3. Pray Ephesians 1:17.

Day 4: Thursday—Expectations! Why do you suppose Jesus gave the men the warning he did in Matthew 16:20? Consider the expectations that probably arose in the hearts of the disciples when Jesus affirmed Peter’s bold procla-

mation (*16:16-17*). Peter understood that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but did he and the others really grasp Jesus’ purpose and mission (see *16:20-23; John 14:25-26; Acts 1:6-8*)? The transfiguration, with its glimpses of Jesus’ glory, was just days away, but the cross also lay ahead. The disciples didn’t yet understand that the glorious Messiah king was also the Suffering Servant (*Isaiah 9:6-7; 53:1-12*). Read Luke 24:13-32 and pray for the Spirit’s illumination.

Day 5: Friday—Who Is Jesus to You?

Read Matthew 16:13-20 again and try to imagine yourself standing with the disciples at this scene in Caesarea Philippi. All becomes quiet as Jesus asks a question that the disciples, and each of us, must answer personally. Remember that the area was rife with false gods and people who did not believe in the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, who did not await the Messiah. How would the disciples answer Jesus’ question? How do we? How do you? How important is our/your answer (see *John 3:16-18; 11:25-27; 14:6; 17:1-5,17; 18:33-38a; 20:31*)? Do you believe that Jesus speaks truth and is truth? Be honest with Jesus; share your heart with him. He loves you!

Day 6: Saturday—What Does This Mean in Your Life?

Our week’s theme, “In Tandem...Let Loose the Good Stuff,” might sound like a strange title, but ponder it in light of Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 2:30-32; 19:10; John 3:16; 13:34-35; 17:18; Acts 1:8; and 1 John 3:23. If we truly believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, how must we respond to him, to the world that he loves, and to people for whom he died? We are recipients of God’s redeeming love; we have life in Jesus’ name, and we are to share these with our words and with our lives. Pray about sharing the gift of Jesus.

Day 7: Sunday—“Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord”

Read Matthew 16:13-20; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12; and Revelation 1:12-18; 11:15. Let Paul Baloche’s lyrics form your prayer: “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; open the eyes of my heart; I want to see You; I want to see You: To see You high and lifted up, shining in the light of Your glory; pour out Your power and love as we sing, ‘holy, holy, holy’...I want to see You” (*1997 Integrity’s Hosanna! Music*). Sit in silence and reflect on who Jesus is. He deserves our hearts, our lives, our everything! Tell him how much you love him and how you long to see him.

